



Assistant Secretary for Health
Surgeon General
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Citizen:

Our country is facing a silent epidemic in the form of Hepatitis C, a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV). An estimated 4 million Americans have been infected with HCV, and a majority of them probably are not aware that they are infected. With that in mind, Members of Congress have joined with the Office of the Surgeon General to distribute this letter so you can take appropriate action for yourself and your family.

Hepatitis C spreads by contact with an infected person's blood. You should get tested for hepatitis C if you:

- have ever injected illegal drugs, even if you experimented a few times many years ago;
- received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant before July, 1992;
- received a blood product for clotting problems produced before 1987;
- have ever been on long-term kidney dialysis;
- have been pricked with a needle that has infected blood on it; or
- were born to a mother with hepatitis C.

In rare cases, you can get hepatitis C by having sex with an infected person, especially if you or your partner have other sexually transmitted diseases. You can NOT get hepatitis C by shaking hands with an infected person, hugging an infected person, kissing an infected person, or sitting next to an infected person.

While some people with hepatitis C experience flu-like symptoms, many don't have any symptoms. If you think you might have been exposed to hepatitis C, go to a doctor. The doctor will test your blood. For many people, hepatitis C is treatable with a drug called interferon, taken either alone or in combination with the drug ribavirin.

It is important to get help, because over time, hepatitis C can cause your liver to stop working. For more information, please contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Hepatitis C Hotline at (888) 443-7232 or check the following web sites:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/c/index.htm>
<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/information/search.htm>

Sincerely,

David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary for Health and
Surgeon General